

THE PACIFICA AFFILIATES REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In September and November, a survey was made of sixty stations that are on record as having been Pacifica Affiliates. Members of the iPNB Affiliates Committee who are working in cooperation with Pacifica's management to determine policies concerning affiliates requisitioned this survey.

The mission of this survey was to build a profile of Pacifica's current affiliate relations. In January, Pacifica inherited an Affiliate Program in tatters. Many radio stations had abandoned affiliate relations with Pacifica in recent years, due to unfair contracts and lack of services. Others left in protest on political principle. Affiliates who stayed with Pacifica had their loyalties severely taxed. Since last January, some radio stations have reopened contractual discussions with Pacifica management but lack of current information about these stations and broken trusts have been a great hindrance. My task, as a temporary consultant, was to call these sixty stations in order to update our data on them and to help reintroduce the process of building good relations.

At the onset of this project, Executive Director Dan Coughlin gave me Pacifica's current affiliate contact information and billing records. Pacifica managers Brian Gibbons and Marianna Berkovich provided these records and other historical information. I was advised by Affiliates Committee chair Teresa Allen and committee member Deena Kolbert. And I used the radio stations' own web sites to prepare, as well.

During the survey, I spoke mostly with Station Managers, although sometimes Program Directors, Operations Managers, Public Affairs Directors, or News Directors turned out to be contact people. The expressed objectives of my telephone interviews with representatives of the radio stations were:

1. To build a database of updated contact information.
2. To determine whether they are currently interested in being a Pacifica affiliate.
3. To determine the current nature of their contractual relationships with the network.
4. To discover the stations' needs, affiliation history, and current opinions about Pacifica.
5. To establish a rapport and inform them that Pacifica is working to rebuild good relations.

During the calls, I advised the stations about Pacifica's fee reduction and of the intention of the iPNB to include affiliate representation on the Board of Directors of the Pacifica Foundation under Pacifica's new bylaws. I offered to post a description of their station with a link to it, on Pacifica's web site.

During every call, some level of disorientation was expressed about how this call related to other calls from Pacifica. The Station Manager of WUSB at University of NY Stony Brook, even revealed that he had stopped speaking to anyone claiming to be from Pacifica after receiving several "inappropriate" calls from "questionable Pacifica reps." He would only speak to me after I was introduced by a Stony Brook alumnus whom he knew. At a few stations, I was the first call from Pacifica in a long time.

Not all of the radio stations will continue on as our affiliates; however, all of the conversations held during this initial survey ended on a positive note. Many people expressed that the call was an appreciated gesture from Pacifica and, as described by one Station Manager, "a step in the right direction."

THE COMMUNITY: GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STATIONS

The sixty radio stations included in this survey represent most of Pacifica's past and present affiliates. They span twenty-eight states, including Alaska and Hawaii. On radio dials, they reside between 88.1 FM and 91.9 FM in the noncommercial-broadcasting band. 29% of the stations said that they receive funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Of these stations, twenty-six (43%) of the stations described themselves as solely community radio stations. More than half of the stations, (thirty-four, or 57%), describe themselves as college stations. Only seven of these are run solely by the colleges, while twenty-seven describe themselves as combined college/community stations. These stations are licensed to colleges or universities but they serve the larger surrounding communities and depend at least partially on financial support from non-students. They usually use both students and members of the surrounding communities for their volunteer staff and radio producers.

The personalities and circumstances of the radio stations are extremely varied. WBDX in Carbondale, Illinois supports itself with a thrift shop. The staff and listeners of KKCR in Hanalei, Hawaii include a significant number of former KPFA members who now live in Hawaii. KKCR identifies itself as part of the Pacifica Radio Network on their web site. Many of the college stations, run by students, are decentralized with a high turnover rate. Therefore, fifteen of their Station Managers told me that they have no real knowledge of the stations' past history regarding Pacifica. Regarding other affiliations, 35% of the stations said their staff attends the Grassroots Radio Conference, and 50% said that they attend conferences of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PACIFICA'S AFFILIATE RELATIONS

One of the questions I asked station representatives was how long their stations have had an affiliate relationship with Pacifica. Fifteen did not know. Three (5%) joined Pacifica between 1980 and 1985. Nine (15%) joined between 1985 and 1990. Four (6.6 %) joined between 1990 and 1995. The greatest influx of affiliates occurred between 1995 and 2000 when twenty-two (36.6%) became Pacifica affiliates.

The above figures can be viewed within a historical perspective of Pacifica's recent affiliate relations that is roughly divided into four eras. These eras, listed below, are identified by many of the people I interviewed through landmark events that served as catalysts for joining or leaving Pacifica.

1. Pre-KU period - 1980's to early 1990's
2. Introduction of KU band & expansion period – mid 1990's to late 1990's
3. Pacifica's Implosion – late 1990's to 2002
4. Post settlement recovery period – January 2002 to the present

In the 1980's and early 1990's, Pacifica distributed programs to affiliates by uplinking them to the C band, the Public Radio Satellite System (PRSS) managed by National Public Radio. However, in 1997, Pacifica moved its programming from the PRSS satellite to an entirely separate satellite, the KU band. Today, Jim Bennett at KPFA in Berkeley manages the KU band. According to Brian Gibbons, Pacifica made this move in 1977 because it aspired to start its own distribution system and planned to fill this isolated band with its own programming.

Between 1995 and 2000, Pacifica promoted its affiliate program and the number of its affiliates grew dramatically. Twenty-two new stations, particularly college stations, joined Pacifica during this period. All but five of the college stations I interviewed reported joining Pacifica after 1995. As part of a marketing promotion to add incentive to new subscribers, Pacifica offered free satellite dishes with the purchase of its programming. The dishes were also offered because different technology (dishes and receivers) was necessitated by Pacifica's move; C band receiving equipment could not be used with the KU band. At least five of the station managers with whom I spoke referenced their history with Pacifica by saying "we were part of [your] satellite dish project."

The creation of *Democracy Now!* in 1996, and Pacifica News are also reasons that are cited for the rise in affiliates during this period of expansion. The national shows were described as "having a strong and loyal following," and some station managers reported being with Pacifica "since the beginning of *Democracy Now!*"

The third era of Pacifica's recent affiliate relations occurred between 2000 and 2002. Identified by many affiliates as the "Pacifica's implosion," this era saw a sudden 72% drop in affiliate participation. At the end of this era, when the iPNB gained control of Pacifica, only seventeen of its former sixty affiliates remained.

The first wave of losses – eight affiliates - occurred when Pacifica's Stringers went on strike in January 2000. The second wave of losses occurred in October 2001 when nineteen more stations left because *Democracy Now!* was removed from Pacifica airwaves. Furthermore, during this period, at least eight other stations cited unfair prices, breakdowns in contract negotiations, chaotic business relations, discouragement, and a general sense of mayhem as reasons for leaving. One station manager said that when, in 2001, Pacifica's Executive Director Bessie Wash interrupted the evening news to speak about Pacifica's problems, he no longer saw Pacifica's newscast as viable and terminated relations with Pacifica the next day. Only three stations cited reasons for leaving that were based on factors not related to Pacifica, such as financial, technical problems, or local program changes.

Since January 2002, Pacifica has lost five affiliates. Four stations left because Pacifica National News (PNN) was terminated. The fifth station left because they still perceived Pacifica as unreliable. Notably, one station manager said that he was not given advanced warning when PNN ended. Because he did not have time to make other arrangements, he said, "The station was extremely embarrassed before its listeners."

Despite problems for affiliates caused by Pacifica, most station representatives have characterized the present as a hopeful time. Twenty-five, 58% of the lost stations have returned since January 2002, leaving us with a new total of thirty-six affiliates. Marianna Berkovich, who works for Pacifica Archives in Los Angeles, and Brian Gibbons, at Pacifica National Headquarters in Washington DC, have been in negotiation with many of the current affiliates since last January. Due to their efforts, more than half of the thirty-six radio stations say they now have satisfactory contracts with Pacifica or are in the process of making them.

Of the remaining twenty-four lost affiliates, eighteen showed interest in returning to some form of affiliate relationship with Pacifica. Eight of these said that they are "very likely" to pursue contracts with us in the near future. Only six stations, 10% of our former affiliates, indicated absolutely no interest in pursuing a relationship with Pacifica.

CURRENT AFFILIATE RELATIONS

The breakdown between Pacifica and the affiliate stations between 2000 and 2002 resulted in a maze of mutilated financial relationships. Some stations were still paying for the Pacifica satellite service although they had dropped Pacifica's programming. Other stations stopped paying Pacifica but were airing *Democracy Now!* Some stations were also airing various other Pacifica programming at no cost simply because communication and contract negotiations with Pacifica management had ceased.

Today, almost all of the former affiliates that are airing Pacifica programs are paying for the KU satellite or are making arrangements to do so. Payment agreements vary greatly. Most payments are made on a quarterly basis; however payments are also made annually, tri-annually, or even monthly. Prices have ranged significantly. Since diplomacy was my priority during these calls, I did not press for detailed information about contracts when it wasn't available. Furthermore, since negotiations are in progress, Pacifica's financial profile regarding affiliates is literally being redefined at this time.

Under the current Pacifica Affiliate Agreement (contract), Pacifica grants to affiliate stations non-exclusive rights to broadcast and stream *Democracy Now!* and all programming produced and distributed by Pacifica as "Pacifica Programs." Other programs, like *FSRN*, are available on the KU band for free.

Twenty-eight stations (almost 78%) - the overwhelming majority - of current Pacifica affiliates are airing *Democracy Now!* and *Free Speech Radio News*. (These are not necessarily the same stations) It is worth noting that of the nineteen affiliates that left when *Democracy Now!* was removed from Pacifica, all but two have returned with it. Six of the affiliates that left with the Stringers have not return to Pacifica, now that the KU band offers *Free Speech Radio News*. However, the stringers have also kept their following: four of those six stations now obtain *FSRN* through other means and pay to them directly. Incidentally, station managers commonly asked whether *FSRN* would be returning to Pacifica and if *DN!* will continue to distribute through Pacifica. Both programs have a following that is growing and are continuing to attract new client stations, although these stations are not necessarily becoming Pacifica affiliates.

Affiliates report taking a variety of other Pacifica programs from the KU satellite but in much lower numbers. Most popular are *Counter Spin* and *This Way Out*, who are currently each taken by seven different stations. Many programs on Pacifica's KU band, such as *Counter Spin* or *Alternative Radio*, etc. are also available on the PRSS C band. At least nine station mangers told me that they take these shows from the C band and use Pacifica's KU band as their back-up system.

College stations, in particular, use the KU band as a pick-and-choose option for their student producers who operate autonomously. Also, several stations managers said things to me like, "I need an ecology show, do you have anything like that?" There is also interest in what other national shows and specials Pacifica plans to offer.

Finally, station representatives have communicated an array of attitudes toward Pacifica, ranging from bitterness, mistrust, and indifference to understanding, admiration, and pride. One former affiliate station's manager politely said he wished to have no further business relations or communication with Pacifica. Another current affiliate will refuse to sign any written contract with Pacifica for at least a year. Most stations describe their attitudes as "wait-and-see," and express deep concerns about Pacifica's ability to organize its relationships with affiliate stations. Several stations complained about a written survey recently sent to them, which they felt contained leading questions and fatigued them.

Across the board, Pacifica's programming was described as unpredictable and fraught with bad communication. If there was one emphatic and overriding sentiment, it was that affiliates want Pacifica to begin providing a focused and efficient day-to-day production relationship in order to feel confidence in its programming. This wish was expressed in the form of concrete requests that were made repeatedly:

1. One contact person in the form of an affiliate coordinator in Pacifica National Management with whom they can build a dependable working relationship.
2. Timely notices of serious operational problems.
3. Timely notices of specials, so that they can rearrange their schedules and inform their audiences.
4. Timely warnings of embedded information in Pacifica programs that does not pertain to the affiliates' audiences, such as pitching for funds or local announcements.
5. Bulletins or informational updates explaining changes to affiliates, such as the new relationship between Pacifica and *DN!*

Despite all the criticisms, many stations gave moving and gracious testimony of their loyalty to the network. Stations in close geographic proximity to Pacifica stations - WUSB in Long Island, KMUD in Redway, California, and KEOS in College Station, Texas – articulated an extensive understanding about Pacifica, coupled with relief akin to having a beloved relative recover from a serious illness. The station manager of KDUR in Durango, Colorado said “We remained committed to Pacifica even through the unpleasantness because it is the most valuable media resource in America. We feel like family.” WERU, in East Orland, Maine proudly referred to the assistance they gave to a Pacifica Campaign protest as the highlight of their relationship with Pacifica.

CONCLUSION

One thing that Pacifica can learn from this survey is that it has a clientele that is committed to both its programming and mission. Although Pacifica recently lost a dramatic 72% of its affiliates in two years, 58% of those were regained within a year and others have indicated the desire to return. Stations use Pacifica as a package to provide newscasts, as well as other resources they can't provide, such as news magazines shows on the level of *Democracy Now!* Other national shows such as Peace Watch and specials could find a larger audience if they were promoted to affiliates. (When I mentioned these to two stations, the managers were interested in receiving information.)

Pacifica is still seen by most as a valued and respected organization that shares a larger vision with its clients, as part of a progressive media movement. However, this survey indicates a history of ambivalence on both sides of the relationship between Pacifica and the affiliate stations. Some affiliates have refrained from rejoining Pacifica due to lack of trust, many express strong reservations, and others feel they need to protect themselves with particular payment or contractual arrangements. Meanwhile, Pacifica, while having succeeded in creating desirable programming, has failed to provide dependable and lasting administration of affiliate relations. It may have used up what good will there is, in the form of returning affiliates. As one station manager put it, “Pacifica has always been so busy that they have limited understanding of partnership opportunities with its affiliates.”

The affiliates program is an area of potential for Pacifica awaiting redefinition. If Pacifica commits the resources and personnel necessary for consistent management, and unleashes the good will, partnership, and resources being offered by our current affiliates, there is the possibility of a second chance for growth. In the current political climate, with more than 100 cities protesting for peace, it is conceivable that we can take the message of peace and political dissent to many new stations around the country that are starving for progressive media.